

TOWN OF BRANCHVILLE  
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

May 12, 2014

The regular Town Council meeting of the Town of Branchville was held Monday, May 12, 2014, at 6 p.m. at Town Hall. Public notice was given to The Times and Democrat and agendas were posted at the Town Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Glenn Miller Sr.

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Mayor Pro Tem Tom Jennings gave the prayer.

Mayor Miller said the Police Department has a new officer, Eric Bonnett, who will be introduced to the Council members individually in the coming weeks.

Mayor Miller gave the roll call. All Council members were present except Michael Blankenship.

Mayor Miller welcomed the guests.

**Minutes:** Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 12 meeting. Councilman Christopher Ott seconded the motion and it carried.

**Public Comments:** Harriett Hughes said she needed more time to circulate a petition asking the state Highway Department to install four-way stop signs on Ott Street. She said she will report her progress at the June 10 Council meeting.

Marianna Street asked if there had been any progress getting a Dollar General Market in town. Mayor Miller said the owner of the present Dollar General in Branchville, Steve Allen, had been in town earlier in the day but was unable to stay for the Council meeting. The Mayor gave assurances that "things are still moving" but asked for patience because it's "such a big project" that "it's going to take time" to navigate the red tape and bring all of the investors on board.

A woman in the audience (who did not identify herself) asked about progress in getting a fast-food chain restaurant and a farmers market in town. The Mayor said he visited St. George's farmers market on its opening day and was "very impressed." He said Branchville's farmers market has been delayed "but it's coming."

Another woman (who did not identify herself) said she was speaking on behalf of Wanda Summers, whose grandmother's funeral was earlier in the day. She said Wanda Summers wanted to make sure the Town was aware of, and did not forget about, her most recent water bill, which was more than \$800.00. Mayor Miller held up a print-out of the billing history and said, "It's a matter that's going to be resolved." He said he had attended the funeral too.

Another woman in the audience asked whether Branchville was going to get another grocery store now that Ott's has closed. She stated she was not referring to the possibility of getting a Dollar General Market, which is a combination supermarket and variety store. Mayor Miller said the people need to get together and push for the things they want.

Councilman Whisenhunt asked the Mayor if he'd heard anything from Herbie Witherspoon, who had questioned his water bill at the April meeting. The Mayor said he had not.

**Financial Report:** Mayor Miller said the packets sent to Council members before meetings will go out on the Wednesday before the June meeting, giving Council members two more days before meetings to review and ask questions about the contents of the packet and the agenda.

Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to approve the financial report. Councilwoman Amy Bryant seconded the motion and it was approved.

**Water Quality Report:** Mayor Miller said the annual water quality report will be included in the next water bill mailing. He said the Town takes seriously its obligation to provide "good water" and to have its quality checked daily.

**MCAA Meeting:** Mayor Miller asked Clerk of Court Lee Hendren to tell the Council about his attendance at a Municipal Court Administrators Association meeting. Mr. Hendren said new state laws were discussed at the meeting and what he learned will make him "more effective" at fulfilling his duties and serving the Town. He thanked the Town for giving him and Clerk-Treasurer Jenny Elliott opportunities to attend and learn at professional training functions.

**Spray fixture:** Mayor Miller said the spray fixture at the playground on Freedom Road will be up and running by Memorial Day as scheduled. He said "the Ditch Witch went on the blink" but town employees still trenched out for the electric wire and installed the drain for the water.

**Invitation:** Council members were invited to attend a breakfast/reception Sunday, May 25, as guests of Upstart Life Ministries, which leases the old high school cafeteria from the Town.

**Water bill concerns:** Mayor Miller reported that the Town purchased a portable flow meter for \$1,000.00 and it can be used to demonstrate the accuracy of a customer's meter. He said no adjustment would be made to a customer's bill if the meter was shown to be accurate.

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "That meter is needed. ... The meter will alleviate a portion of the complaints but it won't alleviate all of them." He referenced Wanda Summers' bill. "Her meter has been reading the same amount for over a year, and we didn't do anything about it."

Mayor Miller said it's "almost impossible" for someone to review every single bill before they are mailed out each month. He said, "We depend on this electronic equipment."

Councilman Whisenhunt said the computer report should flag accounts as "no-flow" if they don't have any water usage.

Councilman Whisenhunt said the Witherspoons' bill illustrates another kind of problem the portable flow meter won't catch. "He's got a radio read meter. They were reading it as a manual." When it was changed in the computer, the Radio Read revealed a "discrepancy" in the usage. When the meter was read manually, "they weren't reading it quite right," Councilman Whisenhunt said. "In actuality, it was the Town's fault."

Councilman Whisenhunt said the Summers' meter was "not read correctly" either.

Mayor Miller replied, "That could be." He added, "That amount of water was used. It just caught up with her."

Mayor Miller said, "We don't have a whole lot of problems. We don't have a whole lot of complaints."

Councilman Whisenhunt said there are "several that need to be addressed."

The Mayor said, "If a person is sent out to do a job," such as to read a meter, "anything you sign off, and it's incorrect, there's a price to pay."

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "I want to start getting that (no-flow) report every time it's printed out."

**Emergency Training:** Mayor Miller said chemical spill response training will be offered in Charleston on May 22 for \$150.00 per attendee and he thinks someone should attend it.

**Reverse 911:** Mayor Miller said an emergency arose and Bill Staley could not get to Branchville to make his presentation on Reverse 911. "He called me at a quarter after 5 (and) asked to be on the June agenda," the Mayor said, adding that his message is worth hearing.

Mayor Miller noted the arrival of Wanda Summers. He told her that her bill could not be resolved that night but "you won't be billed late penalties until we get this straightened out."

**Festival preparations:** Mayor Pro Tem Jennings asked the Town to "get our letters out" by June asking the S.C. Highway Patrol and the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office to commit to providing personnel during the 2014 Rayrode Daze Festival. Last year "a mix-up" resulted in fewer law enforcement officers on hand to direct traffic and maintain order, he said.

**Summer help:** Mayor Miller asked Council to consider allowing him to hire "summer help" as it has done in previous years although "I don't know where the money was coming from."

**Leaks:** Councilman Whisenhunt showed a photo of a leaking fire hydrant on Highway 78. He asked if a cap could be put on it. Mayor Miller said the hydrant is on an "abandoned line."

Councilman Whisenhunt said there is another leak near Larry Lavender's residence. Mayor Miller said it has been leaking under the sidewalk for three years. Councilman Whisenhunt said it had just recently started leaking in the roadway. Mayor Miller said he was not aware of that.

**Hunting Road water:** A woman asked if the work is complete on the Hunting Road water line extension. Mayor Miller said it is, and residents can pick up information at Town Hall on how to sign up for water service. He added, "We need to put it on the town marquee."

**Agenda Change:** Councilman Whisenhunt made a motion to take "public comments on agenda items" off the meeting agendas and instead allow for public comments as the items are discussed during the meeting. He said, "We're kind of doing that anyway and I think it would go a lot smoother." Mayor Pro Tem Jennings seconded the motion and it was approved.

**Special meeting:** Council members agreed to hold a special called meeting on Monday, May 19, 2014, at 6 p.m. at Town Hall to meet with Regina Pencile of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments about applying for a Community Development Block Grant.

**Equipment:** Mayor Miller said a potential buyer of the surplus backhoe was put off by the fact that the machinery would not start. The fuel tank was drained and refilled with fuel, and a "glob of black grease" was removed from the "separator" and "it's running now."

Mayor Miller said the Town also had trouble with the Ditch Witch: "The tire went flat, we changed the tire and it wouldn't start."

Two "broken up" old lawn mowers were discussed. Mayor Miller sought and gained Council's assent to let him sell or otherwise dispose of them at his discretion.

**Chamber of Commerce:** Information on the Orangeburg County Chamber of Commerce was included in Council members' packets. Councilman Jennings made a motion that the Town become a member of the Chamber for one year for \$170.00. Councilman Whisenhunt seconded the motion and the motion carried.

**Items for Information:**

- **Police Chiefs Remembered:** Councilman Gregory Oliver reported that he and Mayor Miller had attended the ceremonies inducting two former Branchville police chiefs into the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers Hall of Fame's Memorial Room.
- **Cell Signals:** Councilman Oliver suggested that the Town contact the cellphone companies that have placed antennae on the Town's water tank and ask them to boost their signals so we can more effectively pick up Radio Read water meter readings in the Cattle Creek Road area.
- **Overgrown Properties:** Councilman Oliver expressed concern that some properties are overgrown, unsightly and potentially dangerous.

Councilman Whisenhunt said, "There's a whole list of ordinances we have. ... Have we cited anybody?"

Mayor Miller said we have not.

Councilman Whisenhunt asked, "Do we plan to?"

Mayor Miller said the Town cannot issue citations for unsightly properties unless there is a functioning board to hear appeals from those who receive the citations.

Councilman Whisenhunt recalled that the Council not too many months ago appointed five people to the appeals board. One was Gregory Oliver, who became ineligible to serve when he was elected a councilman. No Council member remembered the names of all of the other four appointees. The minutes will be reviewed to find out who they are.

(Note: The minutes of the September 9, 2013, council meeting list the following appointees: Pam Jones, 241 Ellis St.; Luvenia Williams, 350 Essie St.; Vivian Fogle, 231 Hughes St.; Gregory Oliver, 1111 Barton St.; and Marianna Street, 7026 Freedom Road.)

- **Lighting:** Councilman Oliver reported that he had replaced the light bulbs at all four welcome signs at the main entrances to Town. He said SCE&G offers a refund for the purchase of LED lights that are supposed to shine for 10 years.

**Adjournment:** At 6:59 p.m., Council approved a motion to adjourn.



Respectfully submitted by Clerk of Court Lee Hendren  
in the absence of Clerk-Treasurer Jenny Elliott